



Coconino County Sheriff's Office

Bill Pribil, Sheriff

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release
Date: July 21, 2008

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Multi-Agency Raid of a Northern Arizona Marijuana Grow Yields 4,200 Plants with an Estimated Street value of 1.5 Million

Flagstaff, AZ – On Wednesday July 16, 2008 at approximately 5:00 am local, state and federal police officers raided a clandestine marijuana grow located in Coconino National Forest in a remote area at the bottom of Woods Canyon resulting in the seizure of approximately 4,200 plants.

On July 7, 2008 two outdoor enthusiasts who were hiking in a remote and rugged area at the bottom of Woods Canyon located South of Schnebly Hill Road and west of Interstate Highway 17 in the Coconino National Forest, when they discovered what they believed to be a large marijuana farm. The two concerned citizens reported their suspicions to members of the Northern Arizona Street Crimes Task Force (Metro). Metro agents responded to the scene and observed the described area from the top of the rim. Agents did not enter the canyon fearing they may alert suspects who were in the area and tending to the plants. With the use of spotting scopes and other vision enhancing equipment, taskforce members were able to confirm the information provided by the two hikers.

The Coconino County Sheriff's Office, the United States Forest Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Flagstaff Police Department formed a joint investigative task force. Task force members were positioned in strategic locations that allowed them to conduct surveillance of the suspected marijuana field and surrounding area. During the investigations detectives and agents observed as many as five male individuals who appeared to be caring for the plants.

The investigation culminated with the formation of a joint multi disciplinary taskforce intended to monitor suspect activity, prevent evidence destruction and apprehend any suspects who were associated with this illegal marijuana cultivation operation. On July 16, 2008 taskforce members descended the canyon and secured the area. Due to the thick vegetation, the vast area involved and the steep terrain, five suspects who were believed to be in the area were able to elude apprehension. Officers secured approximately 4,200 marijuana plants and numerous other items that are associated with an illegal cultivation operation.

“This enforcement effort is the latest example of how local, state and federal law enforcement cut through jurisdictional boundaries and work together in an effort to ensure public safety in our cities, counties, and national forests,” said Coconino County Sheriff Bill Pribil. “This detail is not an isolated effort, rather just one example of a continuing partnership to aggressively enforce laws pertaining to the manufacture, cultivation, sale and use of illegal drugs and narcotics.”



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"This eradication operation means that thousands of pounds of marijuana never made it into our neighborhoods, and millions of dirty dollars never made it into the drug trade," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Elizabeth W. Kempshall. "DEA and our law enforcement partners remain committed to protect our natural resources from the contamination and damage caused by drug traffickers' illicit use of our public lands."

Metro Agents, U.S Forest Service Special Agents, and DEA Agents will continue this investigation in an attempt to identify and apprehend any individuals involved in this illegal operation.

Participating agencies include: Arizona Department of Public Safety air rescue helicopters from Flagstaff, Phoenix and Kingman, the Drug Enforcement Administration provided agents and a helicopter, United States Forest Service Law Enforcement Division, USFS Camp Verde Fire Crew, Alcohol Tobacco and Fire Arms, Arizona Game and Fish, Bureau of Land Management, Arizona National Guard Night Hawk, GITEM, Coconino County Sheriff's Office, Coconino County Sheriff's Search and Rescue, National Park Service Grand Canyon National Park, the Flagstaff Police Department Tactical operations team which is comprised of Flagstaff Police Officers, Coconino County Sheriff's Deputies and Flagstaff Fire Department Paramedics. Participating agencies of the Northern Arizona Street Crimes Task Force (METRO) include: the Arizona Department of Public Safety, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the Coconino County Attorney's Office, the Coconino County Sheriff's Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Flagstaff Police Department, the Northern Arizona University Police Department, the Page Police Department, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the Williams Police Department.

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